

by JOSE ORTEGA Y GASSET

THE REVOLT OF THE MASSES
MAN AND CRISIS

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MAN AND
PEOPLE

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visceral organ hope? As you see, the subject is immense.

And what of that other mode of life in which man *makes believe, pretends*—is it any less interesting? What is this strange, ungentle *doing* to which man sometimes devotes himself precisely for the purpose of really *not doing* even what he is *doing*—the writer who is not a writer but who *pretends* he is a writer, the woman who is scarcely feminine but who *pretends* she is a woman, *pretends* to smile, *pretends* disdain, *pretends* desire, *pretends* love, incapable of really *doing* any of these things?

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Structure of "Our" World

WE find ourselves committed to the difficult task of discovering with unimpeachable clarity, that is, with veritable evidence, what things, facts, phenomena among all those that exist are entitled by their difference from all others to be termed "social." The question concerns us above all because we urgently need to be clear as to what society and its modes are. Like every strictly theoretical problem, this is at the same time an appallingly practical problem, one in which we are up to our necks today and indeed—why not say it?—drowning. We take it up not out of mere curiosity, as we take up an illustrated magazine, or as, forgetting our manners, we look through a crack in a door to see what is happening on the other side, or as the scholar, who is so often blind to real problems, goes through bundles of documents simply from an itch to pry and probe into the details of a life or event. No: in this present task of discovering what society is, the lives of all of us are at stake; hence it is the most genuine possible problem, hence society, to use our former terminology, is of tremendous "importance" to us. And my saying that our lives are at stake is not a figure of speech, sheer or bad rhetoric. Every one of us *l'a échappé belle*, has had the narrowest of escapes. In sober truth, the vast majority of men today, ourselves included, can and should most definitely regard themselves as "survivors," because during these last years all of us have been at the point of death—"for social reasons." In the atrocious events of these years, which are by no means over

and done with today, what has chiefly acted as their decisive cause has been the confusion under which our contemporaries labor in regard to the idea of Society.

To carry out our intention with the utmost strictness we have made our way back to the plane of radical reality (radical because in it all other realities must appear, dawn, bud, arise, exist)—that is, human life. We said of it, in sum:

(1) That human life in the proper and original sense is each individual's life seen from itself, hence that it is always *mine*—that it is personal.

(2) That it consists in man's finding himself, without knowing how or why, obliged, on pain of succumbing, always to be doing something in a particular circumstance—which we shall call the circumstantiality of life, or the fact that man's life is lived in view of circumstances.

(3) That circumstance always offers us different possibilities for acting, hence for being. This obliges us, like it or not, to exercise our freedom. We are forced to be free. Because of this, life is a permanent crossroads and constant perplexity. At every instant we have to choose whether in the next instant or at some other future time we shall be he who does this or he who does that. Hence each of us is incessantly choosing his "doing," hence his being.

(4) Life is untransferable. No one can take my place in the task of deciding what I am to do, and this includes what I am to suffer, for I have to accept the suffering that comes to me from without. My life, then, is constant and inescapable responsibility to myself. What I do—hence, what I think, feel, want—must *make sense*, and *good sense*, to me.

If we put together these attributes, which are those that are of most interest for our theme, we find that life is always personal, circumstantial, untransferable, and

responsible. And now please take careful note of this: if later we come upon a life, whether in ourselves or in others, that does not possess these attributes, this will without any doubt or extenuation mean that it is not human life in the proper and original sense—that is, life as radical reality; it will be life, and, if you please, human life, in another sense, it will be another kind of reality, different from the former, and in addition secondary, derivative, more or less dubious. It would be amusing if in our search we should come upon forms of life that, since they are ours, we should have to call human but that, because they lacked these attributes, we should have also and at the same time to call non-human or in-human. At the moment we do not really understand what this possibility may mean, but I speak of it now so that we may be on the alert.

But for the present let us make firm our knowledge that the properly human in me is only what I think, want, feel, and perform with my body, I being the *creating subject of all this*, that is, of what happens to me as *myself*; hence, my thinking is human only if I think something on my own account, being aware of what it means. *Only that is human in doing which I do because it makes sense to me, that is, which I understand.* In every human action, then, there is a *subject* from whom it emanates and who is thereby its agent, author, or *responsible* for it. A consequence of this is that my human life, which puts me in direct relation with everything about me—minerals, plants, animals, other men—is, essentially, *solitude, aloneness*. My toothache, I said, can pain me *alone*. The thought that I truly think and do not just repeat mechanically because I have heard it, I am obliged to think for myself *alone* or in my solitude. Two and two truly make four—that is, evidently, intelligibly—only when I retire *alone* for a moment and think it.

If we are to study elemental phenomena for a beginning, we should begin with the most elemental of the elemental. Now, the elemental in a reality is what serves as the base for all the rest of it—its simplest component, and, in addition to being simple and basic, the one that we most often do not see, its most hidden, arcane, subtle, or abstract component. We are not accustomed to contemplating it and so we find it difficult to recognize it when someone else expounds it to us and tries to make us see it. In the same way, confronted with a good tapestry we do not see the threads, precisely because the tapestry is made up of them, because they are its elements or components. What we are accustomed to is things, but not the ingredients of which they are made up. To see the ingredients we have to stop seeing their combination, which is the thing—just as, to see the pores in the stones of which a cathedral is built, we have to stop seeing the cathedral. In practical daily life, what concerns us is manipulating already finished and compounded things; hence it is their shape that is familiar to us, that we know and understand. Inversely, to become aware of their elements or components we have to go counter to our mental habits and in imagination, that is, intellectually, break things down, cut up the world so that we can see what is inside it, its ingredients.

Given human life, we are *ipso facto* given two terms or factors that are equally primary and, furthermore, inseparable: Man living, and the circumstance or world in which Man lives. For philosophical idealism since Descartes, only Man is radical or primary reality, and even so it is Man reduced to *une chose qui pense, res cogitans*, thought or ideas. The world has no reality of its own, it is only an ideated world. For Aristotle, on the contrary, originally only things and their combination in the world possess reality. Man is simply a thing among things, a piece of

the world. Only secondarily, because he possesses reason, does Man have a special and pre-eminent role: to reason on all other things and the world, to think what they are, to make the Truth about the world shine in the world by virtue of the word that speaks, that declares or reveals, the truth of things. But Aristotle does not tell us why man possesses reason and speech—*logos* means both—nor does he tell us why the world, in addition to things, contains that other extraordinary thing, the Truth. For him the existence of this reason is simply a fact of the world like any other, like the giraffe's long neck, volcanic eruptions, and the bestiality of beasts. In this decisive sense I say that for Aristotle, Man, reason and all, is neither more nor less than a thing, and hence that for Aristotle there is no other radical reality than things or *being*. If the others were idealists, Aristotle and his disciples are realists. But to us it appears that since, although he is said to possess reason, to be a rational animal, the Aristotelian man, even when he is a philosopher, does not explain *why* he possesses reason, why there is in the universe someone who possesses reason—it follows that he does not give any reason for this enormous accident, whence it follows again that he is without reason. It is obvious that an intelligent being who does not understand why he is intelligent, is not intelligent; his intelligence is only presumptive. To take one's stand beyond—or, if you prefer to put it the other way round, on the hither side, ahead of—Descartes and Aristotle is not to abandon them or to disdain their authority. It is the very reverse: only he who has absorbed them both and has them both within him can escape from them. But this escape does not signify any superiority in respect to their personal genius.

By setting out from human life as radical reality, then, we take a leap beyond the millennial controversy between idealists and realists, and find that two things are equally

real, equally primary in life—Man and World. The World is the net of concerns or importances in which Man is willy-nilly entangled, and Man is the being who willy-nilly finds himself fated to swim in this sea of concerns and irremediably obliged to find all this important. The reason is that life is of import to itself, matters to itself—nay, more, it finally consists in nothing but mattering to itself, and in this sense we should say, with all terminological formality, that “life is what matters.” Hence the world in which it has to run its course, to be, consists in a system of importances, concerns, or *pragmata*. The world or circumstance, we said, is thus an immense pragmatic or practical reality—not a reality made up of things. “Things” in present-day parlance means anything that has its being by and in itself, hence that is independent of us. But the components of the vital world are only those that are for and in my life—not for themselves and in themselves. They *are* only as facilities and difficulties, advantages and disadvantages whereby the I that each one of us is can succeed in being. They are, then, in effect, instruments, utensils, chattels, means that serve me—their being is a being for my ends, aspirations, needs; or else they prove to be obstacles, lacks, impediments, limitations, privations, stumbling-blocks, obstructions, reefs, quagmires. And for reasons that we shall see later, being “things” *sensu stricto* is something that comes afterwards, something secondary and in any case highly questionable. But since our language has no word that adequately expresses what things are for us in our life, I shall continue using the term “things” so that we may understand one another with the fewest possible lexicological innovations.

We have now to investigate the structure and contents of this environment, circumstance, or world in which we have to live. We said that it is composed of things as *pragmata*, that is, that in it we find ourselves with things.

But this finding ourselves with things, encountering them, in itself requires certain investigations, and we shall now proceed to anatomize it rapidly, but step by step.

(1) And the first thing that needs to be said seems to me to be this: if the world is composed of things, these will have to be given me one by one. For example, one thing is an apple. Let us suppose that it is the apple of Paradise rather than the apple of discord. But in this scene in Paradise, we at once discover a curious problem: is the apple that Eve gives to Adam the same apple that Adam sees, finds, and receives? For when Eve offers it, all that is present, visible, patent, is half an apple; and what Adam finds, sees, and receives is likewise only half an apple. What is seen, what is strictly speaking present from Eve's point of view is something different from what is seen and present from Adam's. For every corporeal body has two faces, and as is the case with the moon's two faces, only one of them is present to us. Here, to our surprise, we become aware of something that, once we have observed it, is a great truism—namely, that so far as seeing goes, what is strictly called *seeing*, no one has ever seen what he calls an apple, because an apple according to all accounts has two faces, but only one of them is ever present. Furthermore, if there are two beings seeing it, neither of them sees the same face of it, but another and more or less different one.

Of course I can walk around the apple or turn it in my hand. In such a movement, aspects—that is, different faces—of the apple are presented to me, each continuous with the one before. When I am seeing, really seeing, the second face, I remember the one I saw before and add it to the one I am seeing now. But of course this adding of the remembered to the actually seen does not enable me to see all the sides of the apple at once. The apple, then, as a total unit, hence as what I mean when I say “apple,”

is never present to me, hence does not *exist for me* with radical evidence, but only and at most with an evidence of the second order—the evidence supplied by mere memory, in which we preserve our earlier experiences concerning a thing. Hence to the actual presence of what is only part of a thing we automatically add the rest of it; this “rest,” then, we will say is not presented but is *compresented* or compresent. You will see that this idea of the *com-present*, of the compresence attached to any presence of any thing—an idea that we owe to the great Edmund Husserl—will cast much light for us on the way in which the things of the world appear in our life and on the world in which things are.

(2) The second point to be noted is this:

At this moment we find ourselves in this hall, which is a thing in whose interior we are. It is an interior for two reasons: because it surrounds or envelops us on all sides, and because its form is closed, that is, continuous. Its surface is present to us without interruption, so that we see nothing else; it has neither holes nor openings, breaks, gaps, or fissures that allow us to see other things that are not itself or the objects inside it, chairs, walls, lights, and so on. But let us imagine that when we leave this building here, when my lecture is over, we should find that there was nothing beyond, that is, outside; that the rest of the world was not around it, that its doors gave not on the street, the city, the Universe, but on Nothing. Such a discovery would shock us with surprise and terror. How is this shock to be explained? How—if, all of us being here, only this hall was present to us and (supposing I did not make the observation that I just made) none of us was thinking of whether or not there was a world outside these doors—that is, whether, in the absolute sense, a “without” existed? There can be no doubt about the explanation. Adam too would have suffered a shock of

surprise, although a slighter one, if it had turned out that what Eve gave him was only half an apple, the half that he could see, but lacking the other compresent half. For while this hall is present to us *sensu stricto*, the rest of the world outside it is compresent to us; and as in the case of the apple, this compresence of what is not patent but an accumulated experience tells us that even though it is not in sight, it exists, it *is there*, and we can and must reckon with its possible presence—it is a knowledge that has become habitual for us, that we carry within us habitualized. Now, what acts in us through acquired habit we do not especially notice, we have no particular, present consciousness of it, just because it *is* habit. In addition to the pair of notions *present* and *compresent* we must also distinguish another pair: what exists for us now in a definite, deliberate act; and what exists for us habitually, is constantly in existence for us, but in this veiled, unapparent, and as it were, dormant form of habituality. So be so good as to fix this second pair in your memories: actuality and habituality. The present exists for us in actuality; the compresent in habituality.

And this leads us to a first law concerning the structure of our environment, circumstance, or world: namely, that the vital world is composed of a few things that are present at the moment and countless things that are latent, hidden at the moment, that are not in sight, but we know or believe we know—in this case it makes no difference which—that we could see them, that we could have them present to us. Note, then, that I am now calling latent only that which at each instant I do not see but of which I know that I have seen it before or could, in principle, see it later. From the balconies of Madrid we see the expressive, graceful notched profile of our Guadarrama range, it is present to us. But we know, from having heard it or read it in trustworthy books, that there is also a

Himalayan range, which merely with a little effort and a good supply of checks in our pockets we can *half* see; whereas, so long as we do not make the effort and—as usual—do not have the supply of checks at our command, the Himalayas are there latent for us, but forming a real part of our world in this peculiar form of *potentiality*.

To this first structural law of our world—which consists, I repeat, in the observation that at any moment our world is composed of a few present things and a great many latent ones—we will now add a second law, which is no less evident: namely, that a thing is never present to us by itself but, on the contrary, we always see a thing standing out against other things to which we pay no attention and which form a ground against which what we do see stands out. Here it is clear why I call these laws structural laws: they define for us not the things that are in our world but the structure of our world; to speak strictly, they describe its anatomy. Thus this second law tells us: The world in which we have to live always has two distances and organs—the thing or things that we see attentively, and a ground against which they stand out. For you will observe that the world always holds out one of its parts or things to us as a promontory of reality, leaving, as an unheeded ground to the thing or things to which we are attending, a second distance that functions as the ambit *in which* the thing appears to us. This ground, this second distance, this ambit is what we call “*horizon*.” Every thing that we notice, to which we pay attention, which we look at and concern ourselves with, has a horizon from which and within which it appears to us. I am now referring only to what is visible and present. The horizon too is something that we see, that is *there for us*, patent, but it almost always exists for us and we see it as something not attended to because our attention is held by this, that, or the other thing which at any instant in

our life is playing the role of protagonist. *Beyond* the horizon is the part of the world that is not now *present* to us, the part of it that is *latent* for us.

This somewhat further complicates the structure of the world for us, because now we have three planes or distances in it: as foreground the *thing* that is occupying us, as middle distance the *horizon* of vision, in which the thing appears, and as far distance the *now latent beyond*.

Let us look more closely at the schema of this most elementary anatomical structure of the World. As you see, we are beginning to observe a difference in the meanings of “environment” and of “world,” which we have so far been using as synonyms. “Environment” is the part of the world that at every moment comprises my horizon of vision and that, therefore is present to me. Of course, as we know from our first observation, present things present only their faces, not their backs, which remain only compressed; we see only their obverse and not their reverse. Environment [*contorno*], then, is the patent or semipatent world *around* us [*en torno*]. But in addition to this, beyond our horizon and our environment the world at any particular moment contains a latent immensity made up of pure compresences; an immensity that, in each situation of ours, is a hidden, eclipsed immensity, concealed by our environment and enveloping it. But I repeat once again, this world that is latent *per accidens*, as they say in the seminaries, is not mysterious or arcane or incapable of being present, but is made up of things that we have seen or can see but that at any actual moment are hidden, concealed from us by our environment. Yet in this state of latency and eclipse, they act on our life as habituality, just as, without our being aware of it, the “without” of this hall is acting on us now. The horizon is the dividing line between the part of the world that is patent and the part of it that is latent.

To expedite matters and make the subject easier, I have throughout this exposition referred only to the visible presence of things, because vision and the visible are the clearest form of presence. Hence it is that, from the days of the Greeks, almost all terms pertaining to knowledge and its factors and objects are taken from ordinary words referring to seeing and looking. "Idea" in Greek is the view that a thing presents, its aspect—which in Latin comes in turn from *spec-*, to see, to look. Hence "spectator," he who contemplates; hence "inspector"; hence "respect," that is, the side of a thing that is viewed and considered; "circumspection," the attitude of the wary man who looks all around, not even trusting his own shadow, and so on.

But my having chosen to refer only to visible presence does not mean that it is the only kind of presence; very different characters are no less present to us. Once again I repeat that when I say things are present to us, I say something that is scientifically incorrect, I am speaking loosely. It is a philosophical sin that I commit with great pleasure in order to facilitate entrance into this radical way of thinking about the basic and primordial reality that is our life. But I ask you to note that the expression is inaccurate. What is really present to us is not things; it is colors and the figures that colors form; resistances to our hands and limbs, greater or less, of one sort or another, that is, hard and soft, the hardness of the solid, the yielding resistance of the liquid or fluid, of water, the air; odors pleasant or unpleasant: ethereal, aromatic, delightful, stinking, balsamic, musky, pungent, fetid, repellent; sounds that are murmurs, noises, hummings, hisses, squeaks, buzzes, bangs, crashes, thunderings—and so on through eleven classes of presences that we call "sense objects," for it should be noted that Man does not have only five senses, as tradition avers, but at least eleven, which the psychologists have taught us to differentiate very clearly.

But to call them "sense objects" is to replace the direct names of the patent things that *prima facie* constitute our surroundings by other names that do not designate them directly but that purport to indicate the mechanism through which we notice or perceive them. Instead of saying things that are colors and figures, sounds, odors, and so on, we say "sense objects," sensible things that are visible, tangible, audible, and so on. Now—and this is to be remembered—that colors and shapes, sounds, and so on, exist for us *because* we possess bodily organs that perform the psycho-physiological function of causing us to sense them, of producing the sensations of them in us—be it as plausible, as probable as you please, it is still only a hypothesis, an attempt on our part to explain this marvelous presence to us of our environment. What is unquestionable is that these things *are there*, surround us, envelop us, and that we have to exist among them, with them, despite them. We here have, then, two truths, both primary and basic, but very different in quality or order. That chromatic things and their forms, that sounds, resistances, hard and soft, rough and smooth, *are there*—is an unquestionable truth. That all this is there *because* we possess sense organs and these are what physiology—using a term worthy of Molière's doctor—calls "specific energies," is a probable, but only a probable, truth, that is, a hypothesis.

But this is not what now concerns us; rather it is to point out that the existence of these so-called sensible things is not the primary and unquestionable truth to be stated about our environment; it does not declare the primary character that all these things present to us, or, to express it differently, that these things *are to us*. For by calling them "things" and saying that they *are there* around us, we imply that they have nothing to do with us, that in themselves and primarily they are independent of us, and that if we did not exist they would remain the

same. Now, this is more or less a supposition. The primary and unquestionable truth is this: All these figures of color, of chiaroscuro, of noise and sound, of hardness and softness, are all this in reference to us and for us, in active form. What do I mean by that? What is this action on us in which they primarily consist? Quite simply, in being indications, *signals*, for our conduct of our life, in informing us that something with certain favorable or adverse qualities that we must take into account is there, or, vice versa, that it is not there, that it is lacking.

The blue sky does not begin by being up there so high and quiet and blue, so impassive and indifferent to us; it begins originally by acting on us as a very extensive repertory of signals that are useful for our life; its function, its action, which makes us heed it and therefore see it, is its active role as a semaphore. It makes signals to us. To begin with, the blue sky signals fair weather to us; then too, it is our first diurnal clock, with its traveling sun that, like a laborious and faithful employee of the city, like a municipal service (if, for once, a gratuitous one), daily makes its journey from East to West; and by night the constellations signal the seasons of the year and the millennia to us—the Egyptian calendar was based on the millennial changes of Sirius; and in short, it tells us the time. But its telling, signaling, warning, suggesting activity does not stop here. It was not some superstitious primitive, but Kant himself, and not very long since as these things go, who in 1788 summed up all his proud knowledge by saying: "There are two things that flood the soul with ever-new amazement and veneration which only increase the oftener and the more persistently we meditate on them: the starry sky above me and the moral law within me."

That is, in addition to the sky's signaling all these useful changes to us—these useful but trivial changes of weather,

hours, days, years, millennia—apparently its moving nocturnal presence, with the stars trembling in some impenetrable agitation, signals to us the gigantic existence of the Universe, of its laws, of its profundities, and the absent presence of someone, of some all-powerful Being who calculated it, created it, ordered it, adorned it. There is no question that Kant's phrase is not simply a phrase but that it beautifully describes an essential phenomenon of human life: in the dark of a clear night the star-filled sky winks at us with countless eyes, seems to want to tell us something. We understand what Heine is suggesting when he says that the stars are golden thoughts in the mind of night. Their winking too, minute in each separate star and immense in the entire vault, is a permanent stimulus for us to transcend the world that is our environment and find the radical Universe.